



Lincoln's Birthday in the House

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EDITOR'S NOTE.—*The following excerpts have been made from an address delivered in the House of Representatives, on the anniversary of the birth of Lincoln, three years ago. It was by unanimous consent that the House requested Mr. Fess to deliver this oration, and it is interesting to note that when his time expired the interest of the House was so aroused that by unanimous consent, and amid cries of "Go on!" he continued his eulogy on "Honest Abe"*

SOME men make their place in history by notable utterances, others by notable deeds. Few in the world's history have the credit of both, and to that class belongs Abraham Lincoln. At an early time in his political career, speaking upon the most sensitive question before the country then or since, he showed his courage by saying:

Broken by it I, too may be; bow to it, I never will. The probability that we may fail in a worthy cause is not a sufficient justification for our refusing to support it.

In 1855, in a letter to Judge Robertson of Kentucky, he said:

The one question that wears upon me is, Can our country permanently endure half slave and half free? It is too much for me. May God in his mercy superintend the solution.

I would like to have this body recall this wonderful ability in expression, the like of which probably is not known in any political orator or figure in our country. Why, it was none other than Professor Bailey, a professor of rhetoric in a famous American college, who had been so charmed with the pure English of this plain statesman of the West that he sought an interview to ascertain the secret of his power. Mr. Lincoln at first expressed surprise that he had any power in utterance, but when pressed he substantially said: "Well,

all I can remember is that when neighbors would come to my father's house and talk to father in language I did not understand, I would become offended, sometimes, and I would find myself going to bed that night unable to sleep. I bounded it on the north, south, east, and west until I had caught the idea, and then I said it myself, and when I said it I used the language I would use when talking to the boys on the street." Professor Bailey said: "That is one of the most splendid educational principles I have ever received from any man." To which Mr. Lincoln expressed great surprise.

Mr. Lincoln's ability to express the English language consisted in the use of the small word. Eighty-five per cent of his words are monosyllabic. He never employed a big word when a little one would do. He never clouded his thought by a multiplicity of words. His sentences were always short and their meaning never involved. In a word, he never spoke to be heard, but always to be understood; and therefore he was not always elegant from the standpoint of the rhetorician, but wonderfully expressive. For example, he would say, "I dumped it into a hole"; but Douglas, the rhetorician, would say, "I deposited it into a cavity," which is a good deal better from the standard rule of expression. Lincoln would say, "I dug a ditch"; Douglas would say, "I excavated

a channel." Lincoln said, "My defeat by Douglas in 1858 was due to bad luck; I ran at the wrong time"; Douglas said, "It was due to a strange fortuitous combination of importune contingencies that nobody could have foreseen." Here stands Stephen A. Douglas, a master of rhetoric; Abraham Lincoln, a master of logic; Stephen A. Douglas, eloquent in words; Abraham Lincoln, eloquent in thought; Stephen A. Douglas, appealing to expediency; Abraham Lincoln, appealing to right. Douglas said, "I do not care whether you vote slavery up or vote it down." Lincoln said, "I care very much about what most people care most about." He turned his back upon his audience and spoke to Douglas: "Is it not a false philosophy to build a system upon the basis that you do not care anything about what most people care most about?" It was for that sentence that Mr. Douglas paid him such a tribute in three weeks after the close of those debates. Mr. Lincoln was powerful in this series of debates, and it was here that his wonderful ability as a thinker and debater was first disclosed to the public. I say to you men of Congress that Abraham Lincoln had not an equal on the American platform in the use of pure Anglo-Saxon.

And I think of how he suffered in the White House as the head of the nation, so distracted by civil war and he helpless to end the strife. One night he said to Frank Carpenter at the dead hour of midnight, standing with his hands in this shape [indicating]: "Oh, Carp, Carp, what would I give tonight in exchange for this wearisome hospital of pain and woe that they call the White House for the place that is occupied by some poor boy that sleeps under the sod in a southern battlefield? I cannot stand this thing much longer. I have got to have some relief." When I read from Carpenter, the painter of the famous emancipation picture, I instinctively say: "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings, but ye would not."

I was rocked in a cradle over which was sung the lullaby:

Old Abe Lincoln is dead and gone.
Hurrah! Hurrah!

And I am not the only one in the State of Ohio who was taught that he was not a patriot. But when I come to look into his words and to study his acts and with regard for his magnanimity, together with his intellectuality, I can easily understand why, in the lapse of half a century, there is such universal approval now of the characteristics of that great man in all parts, not only of our nation, but of the world.

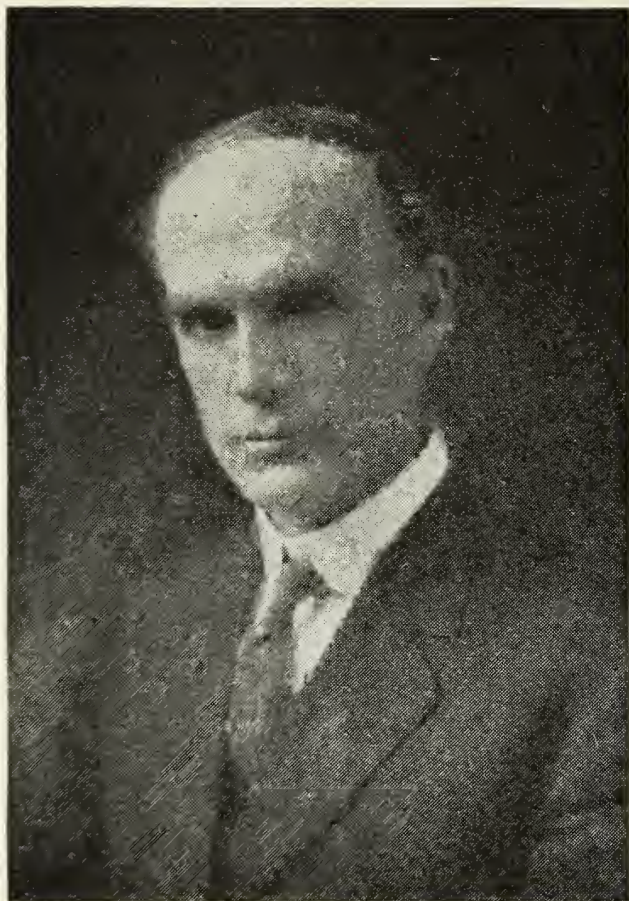
I once asked one of the best editors in this country or in any other, Charles A. Dana, who knew Mr. Lincoln as perhaps no other man knew him during the period that covered the war, what he thought was Lincoln's secret of greatness. Quickly he said: "His control of men." And then he added: "If a man cannot control other men, then his power is limited to what he can do alone. On the other hand, if he can control men, his power is multiplied just to the number of men he controls."

Mr. Lincoln had that ability to differ from men and yet to win them. Note how he struggled with the great commoner, Thaddeus Stevens. When Lincoln insisted upon his method of reconstruction, which Stevens denounced as his shorthand method, destined to swamp the American Congress by Confederate leaders, Lincoln put it in this homely way, or substantially in these terms: "Stevens, you want what I want, but we do not go after it in the same way. Concede that my policy, which you criticise, is now in its beginning to what the policy is when it is finished, as an egg is to the chicken when it is hatched, do you not think you will get that egg quicker by hatching it than by smashing it?" A homely illustration that carries in it a sound philosophy.

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On the night of the second election, quite a scene took place between Lincoln and Stanton. Dana said, "Whitelaw Reid came in, and I, as a matter of courtesy, withdrew and went into another room, where Stanton was. It was not long before I noticed that Stanton was quite indignant. He was walking the floor greatly disturbed. I said to him, 'What troubles you, Mr. Secretary?' and he pointed his hand through the door toward Lincoln." Dana said that Lincoln at that moment was a very comical figure. He was sitting leaning back

against the wall, his legs crossed, and laughing convulsively. He had just read to Reid something from the writings of Petroleum V. Nasby, the editor and humorist of the Toledo *Blade*, at that time almost as popular a writer as was Mark Twain later. "Stanton noticing that he was reading Petroleum V. Nasby seemed so angry," says Mr. Dana, "that he turned to me and said, 'Look there. There sits the man around whom the heartstrings



HON. SIMEON D. FESS
Representative from Ohio

of this nation are wrapped tonight, being amused over a damned mountebank.' " Evidently Mr. Lincoln must have heard him, for he immediately called to Mr. Stanton, "Mr. Secretary, have you ever read anything written by Petroleum V. Neesby?" And Whitelaw Reid, who was sitting by, said, "Nasby, Mr. President, Nasby," when Mr. Lincoln repeated Nasby. Mr. Stanton replied, "No; I haven't time for such buncombe." Mr. Lincoln said, "Here is some buncombe that you would enjoy." He added, "Nasby says there are three kinds of fools. There is the natural fool and the educated fool, and when you take a natural fool and try to educate him,

you have a damphool." Dana said Stanton did not enjoy the joke at all.

You will recall that Lincoln ordered some persons that had been imprisoned at Baltimore upon the charge of treason for the sale of goods to the Confederacy to be liberated, against the wishes of Stanton, and Judge Holt, of Kentucky, went over in confidence on the order of the President and made some arrangement to let the people out without regard to Mr. Stanton's wishes. Mr. Stanton was very much enraged, and he called Mr. Holt, a subordinate, "on the carpet"; but Judge Holt defended himself on the ground that the President had ordered him to do it. It is reported that Mr. Stanton said, "Did Lincoln order you to do that?" Holt said he did. Stanton hesitated a moment and then said, "Holt, the only thing left us is to get rid of that baboon in the White House."

That is a very serious statement to make on the floor of this House when regarded from the standpoint of the relation between chief and subordinate, but it is in the reminiscences. When the matter came to the notice of Mr. Lincoln he said in good humor, "Did Stanton say that?" He was assured that he had, and another person speaking with him said, "I would not endure the insult." Lincoln said, "Insult? That is no insult. All he said was that I was a baboon, and that is only a matter of opinion, sir," and then added, "and the thing that concerns me most is that Stanton said it, and I find he is usually right."

Oh, such magnanimity, when a difference clothes itself in language of insult as well as ridicule, in such a great soul; to differ from men and still hold their respect to the last was a quality possessed in abundance by the great Lincoln.

What is the secret of Mr. Lincoln's ability to control men like Seward and Stanton and Stevens, and other men who were so wonderfully different in temperament and eminently superior to him in all that went to make up modern standards? I think I can give a solution to the mystery. It is a combination of two qualities that are usually found in leadership. The one is that wonderful fund of humor and the other is that deep sense of pathos. At

one moment Mr. Lincoln would make you laugh. At another moment you would want to cry. Strange as it may seem, these seeming contradictories are generally present in the same person. If Lincoln was the most comical man in public life, he was certainly the saddest. The world tires of the person who plays on but one string.

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He has been misunderstood in regard to the slavery agitation. Mr. Lincoln's greatest work, gentlemen, was in the preservation of the Union. Do you not remember in 1863 what a bitter letter he received from Horace Greeley, published in the New York *Tribune* as an open letter to the President, in which Greeley called him "an opportunist"? Mr. Lincoln replied to it—and I want to give you exactly his reply; and, therefore, you will allow me to read that reply. It is one of the suggestive utterances of his life. He replied:

As to the policy I seem to be pursuing, I have not meant to leave anyone in doubt. I would save the Union. I would save it in the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be the Union as it was. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless at the same time they could destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object is to save the Union and not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it. If I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it.

Then he added:

I am ready to accept new views as soon as they are proved to be true views.

I do not mean here to minimize the title of the "great emancipator." I simply mean that the one supreme purpose of his career was to preserve the Union. This does not and should not detract from his achievement as the leader who, by the stroke of his pen, lifted a race out of human chattelhood into the atmosphere of American citizenship. But that achievement was destined to take place; if not by his hand, then by another's. The institution of slavery was indicted by the civilization of the centuries and had to succumb. However, this could not be said of the

preservation of the Union. The greatest single achievement in the history of civil government in the world is the preservation of republican form of government. Since the close of the Civil War this idea has spread over the world like the waters cover the sea. There is not a single country that is not feeling the mighty impulses for self-government, the finest example of which is our own republic. In fixing Lincoln's place in history, it will not be so much the emancipator of a race, as the savior of a nation and republican government on the earth. Both of these accomplishments demanded the best talent of head and heart.

When he was criticized for the appointment of Stanton, who had not supported him, a friend said to him, "Why, Stanton has not been in your favor." Mr. Lincoln said, "That is no matter. I met him down in Cincinnati in a lawsuit where I tested his mettle, and I know his power." And then the interested party said, "But you are the first President of a new party, and you would have a splendid opportunity to build up a political organization." Members of Congress listen to Lincoln in reply: "We will save the Union first and build a party out of what is left." That is another element of statesmanship, it seems to me.

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On the other hand, notice the humor. May I give you an incident that Dana gave me? Lincoln was pestered with office seekers, strange to say, in that day as we are not so much(?) in this. These office seekers came from every place. One day Mr. Lincoln saw three men coming up the walk toward the White House. At the time he seemed in exceptional spirits with humor bubbling over. Lincoln was looking out of the window. He said, "Dana, look. Those three men have been here before. This is the third or fourth time they have come. They want an office. I do not know even where it is. I do not know whether it is in Missouri or Illinois. It would not make any difference whether Tom, Dick, or Harry had it. It will not pay over \$180 a year." Dana urged him not to receive them, when Lincoln replied, "Oh, yes, I will receive them." About that time the man whose duty it was to announce callers to the President came in

and told him there were three men from the West who wanted to see him, and asked what he should say to them. Lincoln said, "Bring them in and let them sit down here." I wish I could tell this story as Dana told it, but I cannot. Dana said the three men came in and took their seats, and Mr. Lincoln, after greeting them, said to them, "Excuse me, gentlemen, until I finish a story I was telling Dana." He had not been telling any story at all, but he began: "I think I was about thirteen years old. Our fashion was to meet in Sunday-school, where we would read sometimes in the Old Testament and sometimes in the New. On this particular day we were reading in the Old about the three Hebrew children. In that class we always would stand in line; the first boy would read and then the next, and if anybody made a mistake the fellow next to him would correct him, turn him down, and go up. There was one fellow in the class, about as tall as I was, who never had learned to read, and he always stood at the foot. (Just excuse me, gentlemen, in a few minutes I will be through with this.) When it came this fellow's turn to read, he read something like this, holding his finger on the page to keep the place, and reading in a loud, monotonous tone, hesitating on every word: 'And—a—part—of—the—kingdom — was — to — be — ruled — over — by — by — by——' 'Well,' said the teacher, 'read on, read on.' 'By — Mes-hach, — Shadrach, — and — Abed-nego.' (Just excuse me, gentlemen, in a few minutes I will be through.) Then the next boy read, and then the next one, and it came around to this boy at the foot again, and the teacher said to him, 'Read that fourteenth verse.' It was the same verse. So he read the same verse again, and in the same hesitating way: 'And — a — part — of — the — kingdom — was — to — be — ruled — over — by — by — by——well, if there don't come them same three gollurned fools again.'"

The leader said, "Mr. President, we will come some time when you are not so busy." As soon as they were out, Lincoln said to Dana, "Didn't we fetch 'em this time?"

If you link the quality of humor, which is always present, to the other quality of pathos, which was instinctive with him,

you have the element in combination that made him the leader of men. It would be easy to illustrate the two qualities by the great number of incidents similar to these I have mentioned in his life.

I think Abraham Lincoln was indeed a man of the people, one among the people, and in sympathy with the people beyond any man in our history. I do not think any man can come to his shoulders in this attribute if measured by what he said, by what he did, by what he really was in that respect. When a man said to him, "The people will go wrong on this matter," he replied, "Intellectually, probably they may; morally, never." The collective wisdom expressed in morals is always better than individual wisdom. "In the multitude of counsel there is safety," said he, quoting it from the Good Book. I could give you numerous suggestions falling from his lips, expressions like these: "God must have loved the common people, for He made so many of them." "You can fool all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time." You know people have said it was Barnum who said that. It was not. It was Lincoln. It is Lincolnian. He believed in the people. In other words, he did not think the Government was going to the bow-wows if attempts were made at some innovation, or changes were inaugurated in the interest of the public. He never failed to see the distinction between an attempt to suppress public opinion and to direct public opinion. The first is unwise; the second is rational. He fearlessly indicted the cowardice of such procedure. After the fugitive slave law was made a part of the Compromise of 1850, both of the leading platforms, Whig and Democratic, declared that the Compromise was the settlement of the slavery issue and forbade its further discussion. Lincoln knew such cowardice was like resolving the tide should cease to flow. Our business is to direct public opinion in the right channels, and not to attempt to suppress it. That was Lincolnian.

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I close with this suggestion: As Mr. Lincoln was closing his career, he was more concerned about the Reconstruction of

LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY IN THE HOUSE

the Seceded States than any other one subject. He made his last speech from the Executive Mansion on the 11th of April. He spoke about Reconstruction, and said that that was one of the things that had most deeply impressed his heart during all these years, and then he said, in substance:

Let us not now enter into a controversy as to whether the States are in the Union or out of the Union. That question can only have the mischievous effect of dividing our friends. We all admit that the States are out of their practical relations with the Union. Let us strive to reinstate the relation as it existed before the war, and when that is done, then let us each one alone take pleasure, if there is any pleasure in it, in seeing whether they were ever away from home. Finding themselves safely at home, it would be utterly immaterial whether they had ever been abroad. Let us not bring that up now, for it can only end in mischief.

To the South he said:

It may be my duty to make some new announcement to the people of the South.

That announcement was never made. Four days later the bullet of the assassin closed his lips forever, and he was not to make an announcement on that or any other great subject. But the one situation he yearned so much to see adjusted was the preservation of the Union as it had been before 1861. His death removed the one insurmountable obstacle to the success of radical measures in Reconstruction. As I once said before, his rare magnanimity, illumined by an intellect equally rare, peculiarly fitted him to pilot the ship through the rough breakers that hugged the shore of nationality as he had safely brought it through the stormy Civil War. He was broad enough to know that too much national prerogative was despotism, and too much State rights might lead to anarchy among the States. I want to say that when the bullet of the assassin laid him low, the best friend the South had in authority had fallen. Jefferson Davis said that next to the fall of the Confederacy the death of Lincoln was the greatest stroke the South ever received.

What a beautiful thing it is to contem-

plate the change of attitude toward him.

Then, the people were divided. Today, fifty years after, our differences, born in the heat of a great national issue that precipitated war, are no more. His name is spoken in reverence by a reunited nation, whose finest product is embodied in the great war President.

His yearning for the cessation of strife was in his every impulse. When the scene of Appomattox had passed, no one was so happy over the prospects of a return to peace as he.

But in a moment of rejoicing all was changed. Another tragedy was to be added to the series of tragedies. It was not his to live to see the fruits of the war, and to so guide its reconstruction as to rebuild safely with the highest honor to all our people. No. It was his to die. He was surrounded by friends, including his official family, as his spirit went home to its God, with whom it had kept so closely throughout the dark hours of civil war.

Stanton, at the head of the bed, now virtually the head of the nation, Seward having been attacked in his sick room, broke the silence of death when he said, "Now he belongs to the ages."

The next day the great Secretary, who had so often differed from his great chief, looked upon his face now asleep in death, and pointing his hand toward him said, "There sleeps the mightiest man that ever ruled a nation."

It was thus left to one of his critics, who differed with and yet loved him, to pass the highest encomium upon him.

In my judgment Abraham Lincoln is the truest type of the American statesman, the broadest in comprehension, the sweetest in disposition, the deepest in humanity of secular history. And now as we are facing today as great problems as ever faced him in his day, let us renew our obligations to our common country by pledging ourselves in his words our last full measure of devotion in the hope that the Government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

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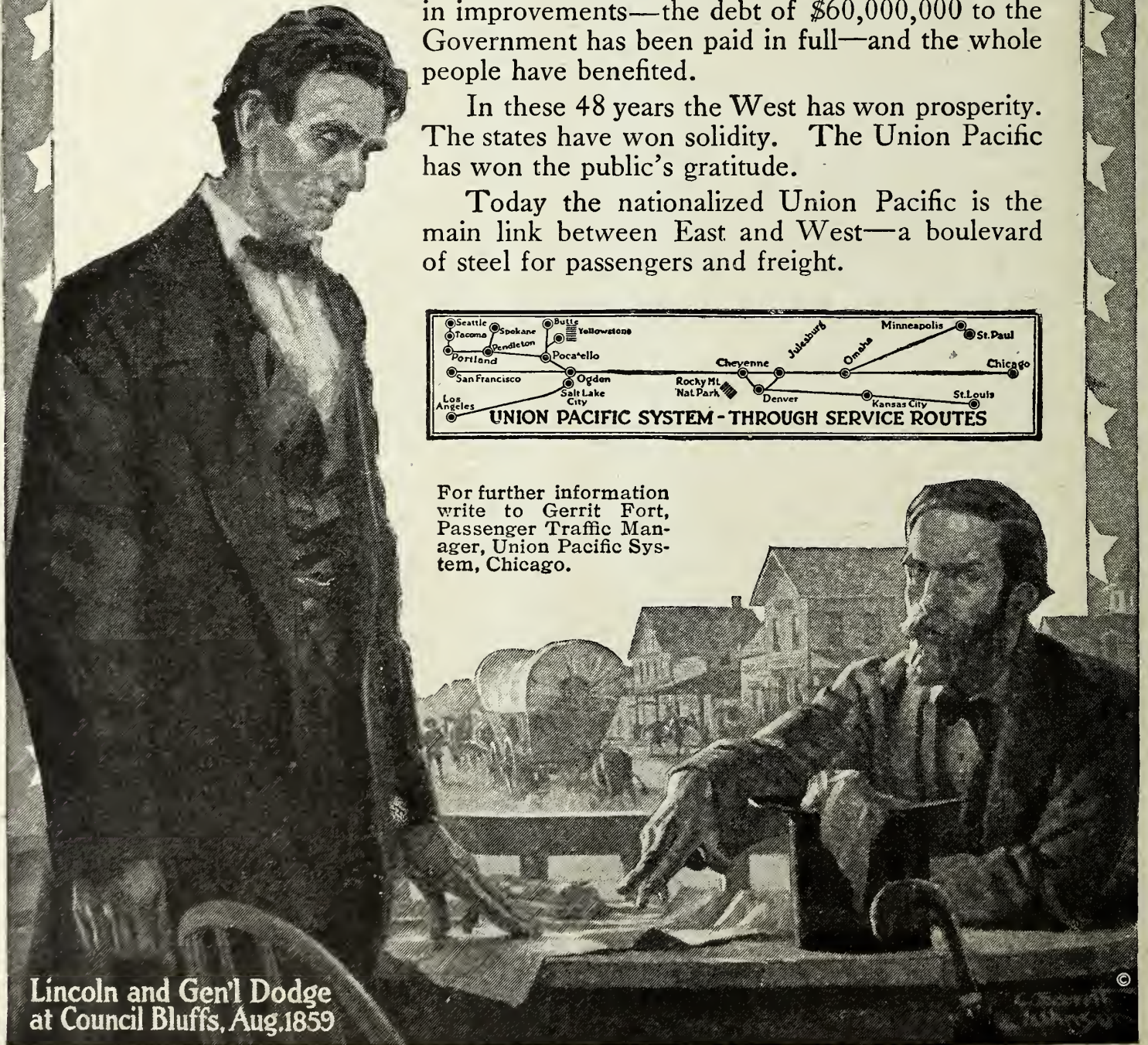
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Lincoln and Gen'l Dodge at Council Bluffs, Aug. 1859